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SUBJECT: ENVIRONMENT MINISTRY GETS BOOST FROM NEW LAW

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Classified By: ECOUNS M. Dodman for reasons 1.4 (b, c).

Summary

¶1. (C) Minister of Environment Narmin Othman told EmbOffs on November 3 the Council of Representatives (CoR) had ratified the new law establishing the Ministry of Environment (MoEnv). She claimed the Prime Minister told the Cabinet to enlarge MoEnv funding, "even if it means taking money away from the other ministries." Coordination with "old ministries" is challenging, she said, because the GOI has not reorganized to make functional room for the new ministries established in ¶2003. Besides continuous turf battles, she also feels frustrated that other ministers "just don't want a lady to be a leader." Othman is negotiating with the Marine Emergency Mutual Aid Center (MEMAC) to reduce Iraq's arrears and rejoin MEMAC as a member in good standing. Embassy oil experts assess that, in the interim, in order to protect the coastlines of other member states, MEMAC would assist Iraq in the event of an Iraqi oil spill in the Persian Gulf. Embassy notes that, while still generally ineffective, there are signs that the MoEnv is slowly improving. End summary.

New System, Old Mentality

¶2. (SBU) Minister of Environment Narmin Othman (PUK) told EmbOffs on November 3 the Council of Representatives (CoR) had ratified the new law establishing the Ministry of Environment (MoEnv). (Comment: The CoR ratified the law on October 9 but it has still not been signed by the President or published in the Gazette. End comment.) The law grants the ministry "some executive responsibility," she said, giving the ministry a mandate to implement projects that go beyond their usual environmental monitoring role. She also claimed that at a recent Council of Ministers meeting, the Prime Minister told the Cabinet to enlarge MoEnv funding, "even if it means taking money away from the other ministries." The MoEnv will also soon also have an additional Deputy Minister for administrative affairs. "The Ministry is becoming stronger day by day," she said.

¶3. (C) Now the lead ministry for demining, "a responsibility I did not initially want," she quipped, MoEnv is working with the Ministry of Defense (MoD) to coordinate operations. Such coordination is challenging, she said, because "those old ministries," never reorganized to make functional room for the new ministries established in 2003. For example, the Ministry of Agriculture still thinks it has lead for National Parks, the Ministry of Water Resources continues to do water quality monitoring, even the new Ministry of Science and Technology believes it should have responsibility for nuclear clean-up. "It is all nonsense," she said. "The Ministry

responsible for providing clean water cannot also be responsible for water quality testing." MoST, MoH, MoEnv and MoWR all conduct water testing but are not always getting the same results, even from the same water source, she admitted. Provincial Governing Councils are having the same problem wresting control of local functions from the Ministry of Municipalities and Public Works. "The system is new, but the mentality is old," she lamented. She also feels the other ministers are unable to accept her as an equal. "They just don't want a lady to be a leader," she said.

Ongoing Negotiations with MEMAC

14. (SBU) Also the lead ministry for responding to oils spills, Othman said that the MoEnv had recently paid Iraq's 2009 yearly dues of KD 200,000 to the Marine Emergency Mutual Aid Center (MEMAC), an organization of eight Gulf member states, including Iraq, to combat oil pollution. MEMAC provides planning support, training, and incident response assistance to member states for oil spills in the Persian Gulf. MEMAC's Director, Captain A. M. Al-Janahi, told EconOff on September 23 that Iraq had not paid its dues since 1989 and was in arrears for membership dues and assistance fees totaling KD 4,727,538 (approximately USD 17.5 million). Due to the large outstanding bill, Iraq is not presently a member in good standing of MEMAC. Othman said that if Iraq had an oil spill in the Persian Gulf, MEMAC would help, but not perform the entire clean up. (Note: MEMAC Director told EconOff on November 8 that Iraq has still not paid its yearly dues, contradicting Minister Othman's claim. Embassy oil experts assess that, despite Iraq's arrears, MEMAC would respond to an Iraqi oil spill in order to protect the coastlines and oil operations of Iraq's neighbors. End

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comment.)

15. (SBU) Othman said she is presently negotiating with MEMAC to have Iraq's outstanding bill significantly reduced. In 1982, when MEMAC was established, Saddam offered to pay 20% of the organizations' yearly costs, 5% more than Iran, and far more than Iraq's relatively short Persian Gulf border should require, according to Othman. She proposes retroactively reducing Iraq's yearly dues to 10% and further discounting that amount by 60% as a sign of good will by Iraq's neighbors for its rebuilding process, bringing the outstanding balance to approximately KD 1.2 million, including KD 300,000 for MEMAC assistance provided during the 2006 spill (reftel). Othman claimed she is cooperating with MEMAC to devise an emergency action plan (EAP) for oil spill response and mitigation in the Persian Gulf. (Note: The MEMAC Director also said that while he has offered planning assistance for an Iraqi EAP, the MoEnv has not yet taken him up on the offer. End note.)

16. (C) Comment: While still generally ineffective, there are signs that the MoEnv is slowly improving. With a new MoEnv Law and additional Deputy Minister, executive and administrative capacity is growing. Without notice, the Minister was capable of holding detailed conversations on a wide range of topics, a vast improvement from only one year ago. Although MEMAC and Othman do not have a common interpretation of the status of their negotiations, there is at least meaningful engagement. End comment.

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